



FDA News

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FDA Warns Consumers Not to Eat Raw Oysters Harvested from the West Karako Bay Section of Growing Area 3 in Louisiana ***POSSIBLE CONTAMINATION WITH NOROVIRUS***

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is warning consumers not to eat raw oysters harvested from West Karako Bay, a section of Growing Area 3 in Louisiana. These oysters, harvested from Dec. 3 through Dec. 21, may be contaminated with norovirus.

Symptoms of norovirus infection include nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and stomach cramping. Affected individuals often experience low-grade fever, chills, headache, muscle aches, and a general sense of tiredness. Most people show symptoms within 48 hours of exposure to the virus, with the illness lasting one to two days. However, the illness can become serious for the very young, the elderly and people with weakened immune systems.

Consumers who ate raw oysters on or after Dec. 3 and experienced these symptoms are encouraged to contact their health care providers and local health departments. Consumers concerned about the origin of oysters they have recently purchased should contact the place of purchase to determine if the oysters were harvested from the identified area during the Dec. 3-21 period.

FDA has received reports of norovirus infection in seven individuals who ate raw oysters on Dec. 13 at a restaurant in Chattanooga, Tenn. The Tennessee Department of Health's test results from two of the ill patients were positive for norovirus. FDA confirmed the presence of norovirus in shell oysters harvested from the West Karako Bay section of Growing Area 3 and were served at the restaurant. Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals closed the affected growing area on Dec. 21. FDA is working with the states involved to determine if any additional actions may be necessary to ensure public health protection.

The original shipper of the oysters is Prestige Oyster Company of Theriot, La. The company shipped the oysters to Bon Secour Fisheries in Bon Secour, Ala. Bon Secour Fisheries, in turn, shipped the oysters to the restaurant in Chattanooga. Considering the shelf-life of the product, it is possible that suspect oysters from the designated area are still available in other retail and food service settings.

Persons with weakened immune systems, including those affected by AIDS, and persons with chronic alcohol abuse, liver, stomach or blood disorders, cancer, diabetes or kidney disease should avoid raw oyster consumption altogether, regardless of where the oysters are harvested.

Cooking destroys the virus, eliminating the risk of illness for both healthy and immunocompromised individuals. FDA advises that it's always best to cook seafood thoroughly to minimize the risk of foodborne illness. Consumers can continue to enjoy oysters in many cooked preparations by following this advice:

At Restaurants and other Foodservice Establishments:

- Order oysters fully cooked.

In the Shell:

- Purchase oysters with the shells closed. Throw away any oysters with shells already opened.

To prepare oysters for eating, choose one of the following methods:

- Boil oysters until the shells open. Once open, boil for an additional 3-5 minutes.
- Steamer - add oysters to water that are already steaming and cook live oysters until the shells open; once open steam for another 4-9 minutes.
- Use smaller pots to boil or steam oysters. Using larger pots, or cooking too many oysters at one time, may cause uneven heat distribution, which may cause the oysters in the middle to not get fully cooked.
- Discard any oysters that do not open during cooking.

Shucked Oysters:

To prepare oysters for eating, choose one of the following methods:

- Boil or simmer shucked oysters for at least 3 minutes or until the edges curl.
- Fry at 375 degrees for at least 3 minutes.
- Broil 3 inches from heat for 3 minutes.
- Bake at 450 degrees for 10 minutes.

For further information contact:

FDA Food Safety Hotline: 1-888-SAFEFOOD

FDA website: www.cfsan.fda.gov